



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

- ART. VII.—1. *Melibæus-Hipponax. The Biglow Papers, edited, with an Introduction, Notes, Glossary, and Copious Index.* By HOMER WILBUR, A. M., Pastor of the First Church in Jaalam, and (Prospective) Member of many Literary, Learned, and Scientific Societies. Cambridge : George Nichols. 1848. 12mo. pp. 163.
2. *A Fable for Critics, or a Glance at a Few of our Literary Progenies, from the Tub of Diogenes.* By a Wonderful Quiz. G. P. Putnam, Broadway.\* 1848. 12mo. pp. 78.
3. *Poems.* By OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES. New and Enlarged Edition. Boston : W. D. Ticknor & Co. 1849. 12mo. pp. 272.

THERE are not many wits or humorists in the list of American poets. Life in this country, as our Transatlantic friends would be apt to say, is a very serious thing ; or at any rate, we take terribly serious views of it. A quick perception of the ludicrous, and a broad and genial appreciation of humor and fun, are qualities in which not only our writers, whether in prose or verse, but the much greater multitude of our readers, are held to be very deficient. Trumbull's "McFingal," which is a tolerably successful imitation of Hudibras, — Joel Barlow's "Hasty Pudding," an admirable mock-heroic in blank verse, — poor Fessenden's "Terrible Tractoration," a sufficiently pungent political satire,— and Halleck's "Fanny," which has more ease and sprightliness than Lord Byron's "Beppo," but not so much wit,— are the only poems

---

\* At the risk of spoiling the writer's ancient and humorous conceit, we have copied above only that portion of his title-page which appears in honest black ink, as we have not room and red ochre enough to set forth a facsimile of it, with all its quaint devices. Meaning to be fair, however, we subjoin a full copy of it, *minus* the red ink and the division into lines; the reader may carve it into slices to suit himself, placing the words that rhyme with each other at the beginning, middle, or end of a line, just as he sees fit.

"Reader ! walk up at once (it will soon be too late) and buy at a perfectly ruinous rate A Fable for Critics ; or Better—I like, as a thing that the reader's first fancy may strike, an old-fashioned title-page, such as presents a tabular view of the volume's contents — A Glance at a Few of our Literary Progenies (Mrs. Malaprop's word) from the Tub of Diogenes ; that is, a Series of Jokes by a Wonderful Quiz, who accompanies himself with a rub-a-dub-dub, full of spirit and grace, on the top of the tub. Set forth in October, the 21st day, in the year '48. G. P. Putnam, Broadway."

of any length, that we can remember, in which our countrymen have fairly attempted to get the laughers on their side. Their reception was not very encouraging ; they had their day, but are now rapidly passing, with other trifles, into oblivion. Satire, in fact, is almost necessarily short-lived ; its proper objects are men and manners that have acquired temporary and undue popularity. As taste and fashion change, whether from the potent influence of ridicule or other causes, these sink back into their original nothingness, and the laughter which they had provoked dies along with them. The parody is no longer a parody, when the original is forgotten. Sometimes, indeed, wit embalms the victims that it has slain ; those whose very names would otherwise have perished at the close of their generation obtain in well-spiced lampoons a dubious *post-mortem* existence. Their ghosts flit about in a sort of limbo which lies between the gulf of oblivion and the poet's immortality. Thus, the Dunciad is a splendid monument erected to the memory of all the dunces of good Queen Anne's time, all of whom probably considered themselves as "done to death by slanderous tongues." Enshrined in Pope's wit, they look like flies and spiders preserved in amber. But the poet himself suffers some inconvenience in rescuing these putrescent bodies from the dunghill ; Pope's satire cannot now be read without a cartload of commentary to tell us who the objects of it were.

In our own country, the satirist finds an open field and abundance of game. Our national tendency to exaggeration is continually making such ludicrous exhibitions of itself, that even a faithful portraiture of it looks like mockery, and well-meant likenesses are viewed as caricatures. Dr. Franklin was right in counselling us to take the cock turkey, rather than the eagle, as our national emblem ; and we proved the justice of his advice by refusing to follow it. Our military heroes, who make their only campaigns in a training-field, our Fourth-of-July orators and political debaters, strut and gobble to perfection. We exaggerate every thing ; our reformers aim at nothing less than improving the affairs of the universe, and our philanthropists carry the spirit of love so far that they end by hating all mankind for refusing to join them. Here is a crowd of them, who have so heated themselves by preaching against "the peculiar domestic institution," that they will not be satisfied with pitching slavery into the bottomless gulf,

unless they can throw in the State and the Church, the Constitution and Christianity, along with it. Even the Rev. Homer Wilbur, editor of "The Biglow Papers," though in the main a good-natured parson, and something of a bore, as country parsons are apt to be, quite loses patience and forgets his character when he comes to speak of this exciting subject; he drops his cassock, catches up a knotted club or a broad-axe, and lays about him like a Yankee Hercules who has just put the shirt of Nessus on.

The only sort of wit in which Americans are admitted to excel consists chiefly in quaint and monstrous exaggerations, such as a Kentuckian, who is noted for them, would call "almighty lies." An eminent English critic observes, that "lying is a species of wit and humor; for to lay any thing to a person's charge from which he is perfectly free shows spirit and invention; and the more incredible the effrontery, the greater is the joke." According to this definition, a certain personage who shall be nameless, but whose principal appellation is derived from his propensity to slander, must be considered as a very witty fellow, and even as the father of wits. Now a Yankee is noted for his inventive talent, and in expedients for money-getting most persons would consider him a match for the respectable character just alluded to. "Put him on Juan Fernandez," says the Rev. Mr. Wilbur, "and he would make a spelling-book first, and a salt-pan afterwards." His imagination is naturally fired by his own success, and by the wonders of which his darling New World has been and is the theatre. It is not strange, then, that he should riot in anticipations of what the future is to bring forth, that his hopes and fancies should be to him as realities, and his exposition of them appear as grotesque and humorous mendacity. Why should he not be boastful, and magnificent in his figures of speech? What was only one of his quaint exaggerations ten years ago, that a report should be carried two thousand miles "in less than no time," is now realized by the magnetic telegraph, which, with a speed that outstrips the sun, enables the good people of St. Louis to read a speech by their Congressman at Washington before it is delivered. At present, Jonathan is occupied in "annexing" all territory conterminous with his own, and in building railroads to the Pacific; it is natural that his head should be a little turned by the grandeur and facility of these mighty proceedings. If he is not a wit,

it is because the progress of events turns the brightest fancies of his brain, as soon as they are coined, into sober verities.

As for humor, the Yankee variety of it is very quiet and saturnine. It peeps out, now and then, when the spirit of mirthfulness is a little excited by the sight of the odd jumbles and contrasts that are presented in a newly formed society. Jonathan laughs at the heterogeneous combinations that are effected by his own makeshift talent, and not infrequently by the results of his own political elections. A president's cabinet is often a more curious piece of mosaic than that which the genius of Burke has immortalized ; and Congress, made up of representatives and delegates from twenty degrees of latitude, and about fifty of longitude, is a still more *bizarre* assemblage. They scout all adherence to routine, all formal modes of action, and a political movement which was commenced in earnest soon comes, through its very extravagance, to end in a joke. The orator laughs at his own magniloquence and bathos, and therefore is never disconcerted by the merriment of his audience. If we have but few clever caricaturists, such as those who have made the fortune of Punch, it is because the original absurdity cannot be amplified, or made to appear more grotesque than it is by nature. The foreign element in our population still affords the richest materials for humor ; Irving had to go back to the days of the Dutch dynasty in New York, before he could find those broad contrasts and farcical pictures of society with which he has delighted the readers of Knickerbocker. The more delicate touches of his mirthfulness appear in the sketches that he has given of English manners ; his own countrymen were not good subjects for so fine a pencil.

We are not quite sure that "The Biglow Papers" will be added to the list of successful humorous publications. All the persons concerned in them have a political object in view, and are so earnest in the pursuit of it, that they sometimes quite forget that their only vocation is to laugh at the follies of others. The writer evidently belongs to the "Free-soil party," so called, a humorous combination of odds and ends from the two great parties that divide the country, which has made more noise than either of them during the recent elections, and ended, as one might have supposed from the heterogeneous elements that it brought together, in failing to carry a single electoral vote. Hosea Biglow's

verses first appeared in the newspapers of the day, to herald the cause of this strange coalition, and are now collected and republished, to serve apparently as its epitaph. They were received with merited favor, from their droll and felicitous portraiture of the Yankee character and dialect, and their successful hits at our national passion for military glory. Political opponents as well as friends laughed loud and long at Birdofredom Sawin's letters, describing his experience in the wars, and the mishaps that he encountered before he could make his way home again. We must quote a portion of his first letter from Mexico, though the phraseology may appear abstruse to some of our readers, who are not familiar with New England forms of speech. We can vouch for it, however, that it is classical Yankee, though the spelling of many words is needlessly altered to indicate minute peculiarities of pronunciation.

" This 'ere 's about the meanest place a skunk could wal diskiver (Saltillo 's Mexican, I b'lieve, fer wut we call Salt-river).

The sort o' trash a feller gits to eat doos beat all nater,  
I 'd give a year's pay fer a smell o' one good bluenose tater;  
The country here thet Mister Bolles declared to be so charmin'  
Throughout is swarmin' with the most alarmin' kind o' varmin'.  
He talked about delishis froots, but then it wuz a wopper all,  
The holl on't 's mud an' prickly pears, with here an' there a  
chapparal;

You see a feller peekin' out, an', fust you know, a lariat  
Is round your throat an' you a copse, 'fore you can say, ' Wut  
air ye at? ' \*

You never see such darned gret bugs (it may not be irrelevant  
To say I 've seen a *scarabæus pilularius* † big ez a year old  
elephant);

The rigiment come up one day in time to stop a red bug  
From runnin' off with Cunngle Wright, — 't wuz jest a com-  
mon *cimex lectularius*.

One night I started up on eend an' thought I wuz to hum agin,  
I heern a horn, thinks I it 's Sol the fisherman hez come agin,

\* "these fellers are verry proppilly called Rank Heroes, and the more tha kill the ranker and more Herowick tha bekum.—H. B."

† "it wuz 'tumblebug' as he Writ it, but the parson put the Latten instid. i sed tother maid better meeter, but he said tha was eddykated peopl to Boston and tha would n't stan' it no how. idnow as tha *wood* and idnow as tha *wood*. — H. B."

*His bellowses is sound enough, — ez I 'm a livin' creeter,  
I felt a thing go thru my leg, — 't wuz nothin' more 'n a  
skeeter!*

*Then there 's the yaller fever, tu, they call it here el vomito, —  
(Come, thet wun't du, you landcrab there, I tell ye to le' go  
my toe !*

*My gracious ! it 's a scorpion thet 's took a shine to play  
with 't,*

*I dars n't skeer the tarnal thing fer fear he 'd run away  
with 't.)*

*Afore I come away from hum I hed a strong persuasion  
Thet Mexicans worn't human beans,\* — an ourang outang na-  
tion,*

*A sort o' folks a chap could kill an' never dream on 't arter,  
No more 'n a feller 'd dream o' pigs thet he hed hed to slarter ;  
I 'd an idee thet they were built arter the darkie fashion all,  
An' kickin' colored folks about, you know, 's a kind o' national ;  
But wen I jined I worn't so wise ez thet air queen o' Sheby,  
Fer, come to look at 'em, they aint much diff'rent from wut  
we be,*

*An' here we air ascrougin' 'em out o' thir own dominions,  
Ashelterin' 'em, ez Caleb sez, under our eagle's pinions,  
Wich means to take a feller up jest by the slack o' 's trowsis  
An' walk him Spanish clean right out o' all his homes an'  
houses ;*

*Wal, it doos seem a curus way, but then hooraw fer Jackson !  
It must be right, fer Caleb sez it 's reg'lar Anglo-saxon."*

— pp. 21–25.

This is very fair fun. The rhymes are as startling and felicitous as any in Hudibras, and the quaint drollery of the illustrations is in admirable keeping with the whole character of the forlorn recruit from Massachusetts. Of the almost numberless imitations of the Yankee dialect, this is decidedly the best that we have seen. Sam Slick is a mere pretender in comparison ; the jargon which he uses is a hodgepodge of provincialisms from every State in the Union, with a slight mixture of odd phrases from Nova Scotia. We have found but one phrase in the Biglow Papers, which has only a doubtful claim to New England paternity. To "let on," meaning to *confess*, or *make known*, is frequently used in the Western States ; but it is a flower of speech that

---

\* "he means human beings, that 's wut he means. i sposse he kinder thought tha wuz human beans ware the Xisle Poles comes from. — H. B."

never appears in Yankee land, to our knowledge, except as an exotic.

To show our friend Biglow's almost marvellous facility in versification, we quote a portion of what he calls a debate in the Senate, set to a nursery rhyme. The laughable manner in which the names of honorable Senators are hitched into jingle will remind the reader of some of Sheridan's lampoons in the same key, against the chiefs of the party who were opposed to him, as quoted in Moore's life of the great wit and dramatist.

“ ‘ It ’ll break up the Union, this talk about freedom,  
 An’ your fact’ry gals (soon ez we split) ’ll make head,  
 An’ gittin’ some Miss chief or other to lead ’em,  
 ’ll go to work raisin’ promiscoous Ned,’  
 Sez John C. Calhoun, sez he ; —  
 ‘ Yes, the North,’ sez Colquitt,  
 ‘ Ef we Southerners all quit,  
 Would go down like a busted balloon,’ sez he.

“ ‘ Jest look wut is doin’, wut annyky ’s brewin’  
 In the beautiful clime o’ the olive an’ vine,  
 All the wise aristoxys is tumblin’ to ruin,  
 An’ the sankylots drorin’ an’ drinkin’ their wine,’  
 Sez John C. Calhoun, sez he ; —  
 ‘ Yes,’ sez Johnson, ‘ in France  
 They ’re beginnin’ to dance  
 Beelzebub’s own rigadoon,’ sez he.

“ ‘ The South ’s safe enough, it don’t feel a mite skeery,  
 Our slaves in their darkness an’ dut air tu blest  
 Not to welcome with proud hallylugers the ery  
 Wen our eagle kicks yourn from the naytional nest,’  
 Sez John C. Calhoun, sez he ; —  
 ‘ O,’ sez Westcott o’ Florida,  
 ‘ Wut treason is horrider  
 Then our priv’leges tryin’ to proon ? ’ sez he.

“ ‘ It ’s ’coz they ’re so happy, thet, wen crazy sarpints  
 Stick their nose in our bizness, we git so darned riled ;  
 We think it ’s our dooty to give pooty sharp hints,  
 Thet the last crumb of Edin on airth shan’t be spiled,’  
 Sez John C. Calhoun, sez he ; —  
 ‘ Ah,’ sez Dixon H. Lewis,  
 ‘ It perfectly true is  
 Thet slavery ’s airth’s grettest boon,’ sez he.”

Hosea Biglow and his friends, it is evident, are hot opponents of slavery, and the irascible temperament, which he shares with every member of his party, appears oddly enough under the broad burlesque of his rhymes. If other "abolitionists" had a tenth part of his humor, their fierce denunciations and self-glorifying spirit would exercise the patience of reasonable people in a much smaller degree than they do at present.

We cannot say much for the copious prose commentary, the prefatory and illustrative matter, in which the Biglow rhymes, in this edition, are imbedded. Most of Parson Wilbur's *lengthy* annotations are as heavy as his own sermons, from which, indeed, a large part of them profess to have been borrowed. Hosea Biglow, with his father 'Zekiel, and Birdofredom Sawin, are true and lifelike creations, admirably sustained throughout, and made up of materials with which the writer is evidently familiar. But the Parson is a quaint jumble of half a dozen characters whom we know only in books, and is a tedious old fellow to boot. There is not a bit of the Yankee in him, and his elaborate pedantry is far-fetched and wearisome to the last degree. He is a compound of Jedediah Cleishbotham, Thomas Carlyle, and an American antislavery haranguer,—the attempt to fuse together these discordant elements being quite a failure. The following, for instance, is wholly after the manner of the worthy pedagogue of Ganderclough.

"Mr. B. does not employ his pen, I can safely say, for any lucre of worldly gain, or to be exalted by the carnal plaudits of men, *digito monstrari*, &c. He does not wait upon Providence for mercies, and in his heart mean *merces*. But I should esteem myself as verily deficient in my duty (who am his friend and in some unworthy sort his spiritual *fidus Achates*, &c.), if I did not step forward to claim for him whatever measure of applause might be assigned to him by the judicious.

"If this were a fitting occasion, I might venture here a brief dissertation touching the manner and kind of my young friend's poetry. But I dubitate whether this abstruser sort of speculation (though enlivened by some apposite instances from Aristophanes) would sufficiently interest your oppidan readers. As regards their satirical tone, and their plainness of speech, I will only say, that, in my pastoral experience, I have found that the Arch-Enemy loves nothing better than to be treated as a religious, moral, and intellectual being, and that there is no *apage Sathanas!* so

potent as ridicule. But it is a kind of weapon that must have a button of good-nature on the point of it." — p. 39.

And this, again, is in studied imitation of Mr. Carlyle, the most unsafe of all models, owing to his fondness for broad caricature.

"I know of no so responsible position as that of the public journalist. The editor of our day bears the same relation to his time that the clerk bore to the age before the invention of printing. Indeed, the position which he holds is that which the clergyman should hold even now. But the clergyman chooses to walk off to the extreme edge of the world, and to throw such seed as he has clear over into that darkness which he calls the Next Life. As if *next* did not mean *nearest*, and as if any life were nearer than that immediately present one which boils and eddies all around him at the caucus, the ratification meeting, and the polls! Who taught him to exhort men to prepare for eternity, as for some future era of which the present forms no integral part? The furrow which Time is even now turning runs through the Everlasting, and in that must he plant, or nowhere. Yet he would fain believe and teach that we are *going* to have more of eternity than we have now. This *going* of his is like that of the auctioneer, on which *gone* follows before we have made up our minds to bid,—in which manner, not three months back, I lost an excellent copy of Chappelow on Job. So it has come to pass that the preacher, instead of being a living force, has faded into an emblematic figure at christenings, weddings, and funerals." — pp. 73, 74.

We pass to the next book on our list, *A Fable for Critics*. Common rumor attributes it to the same pen which wrote *The Biglow Papers*; and if there was no other reason for this conjecture but the author's extraordinary command of Hudibrastic rhymes, and the easy flow of his versification, we should think it must be well founded. The Fable, which, by the way, is no fable at all, is really a very pleasant and sparkling poem, abounding in flashes of brilliant satire, edged with wit enough to delight even its victims. It is far more spirited and entertaining than one would expect from the labored conceits of its title-page and preface, which, with their forced and concealed jingle, are but melancholy introductions for the lively and half-grotesque rhymes that follow. The framework of the poem is too slight to merit notice; the writer evidently began with some idea of a plot or an apologue, but soon tired of it, and throwing the reins upon the neck of his Pegasus,

allowed the verse to "wander at its own sweet will." Goldsmith's *Retaliation* was certainly his model, and though he comes far short of that exquisite mixture of playful satire and discriminating portraiture of character, under which the good-nature of the kind-hearted poet appears so constantly that not one of his glittering shafts leaves a painful wound, he quite equals it in the easy flow of his rhymes, and surpasses it in wit and sauciness. We are doubtful about his puns, though most of them are very good, and they sometimes fall as rapidly as drops in a shower ; but at best, they are only wit's bastard offspring, and become tedious enough in print, though they enliven small-talk. Condensation is the quality in which the writer is most deficient ; if his poem were pruned down to the length of the *Retaliation*, we venture to predict that it would become almost as universal a favorite.

A Fable for Critics begins, of course, with a full-length likeness of one of the luckless tribe of reviewers, on which the poet has expended all his stores of merry sarcasm. It is but fair that the verse-makers, now and then, should have their revenge, as each one of them has grievances enough to complain of, for he invariably ascribes all his ill luck with the public to that rascally article in the last Quarterly. We have some doubts about the truth of their favorite notion, that the Review was established for no other purpose than that of flaying unlucky but meritorious bards ; but as they evidently find comfort in this belief, it would be a pity to deprive them of it. We cannot say much for the consistency of the poet now before us, who has no sooner done with roasting the critics than he forthwith turns critic himself, thinking, apparently, that the world could not get along without the services of at least one of the fraternity. His Fable is simply a very witty review article, done into rhyme. Most American writers of the present day who have any claim to notice, and some who have not, are summoned before him to have their portraits taken, and then dismissed, usually with a sharp rap or two on the knuckles. The sketches are drawn in a very free and bold manner, though they have the usual defect of caricatures, that the most prominent and peculiar feature is brought out in high relief, and maliciously magnified, so that the likeness is instantly recognized, though the remainder of the face is left out altogether, or so drawn as to bear no resemblance to the original. Lord Brougham is immediately

known in Punch merely by the unhappy outline of his nose. The following witty sketch of the elder Dana has the same fault ; a playful exaggeration of one point in his literary character is made to stand for a portrait of the whole man.

“ Here comes Dana, abstractedly loitering along,  
 Involved in a paulo-post-future of song,  
 Who ’ll be going to write what ’ll never be written  
 Till the Muse, ere he thinks of it, gives him the mitten,—  
 Who is so well aware of how things should be done,  
 That his own works displease him before they ’re begun,—  
 Who so well all that makes up good poetry knows,  
 That the best of his poems is written in prose ;  
 All saddled and bridled stood Pegasus waiting,  
 He was booted and spurred, but he loitered debating,  
 In a very grave question his soul was immersed,—  
 Which foot in the stirrup he ought to put first ;  
 And while this point and that he judicially dwelt on,  
 He, somehow or other, had written Paul Felton,  
 Whose beauties or faults, whichsoever you see there,  
 You ’ll allow only genius could hit upon either.  
 That he once was the Idle Man none will deplore,  
 But I fear he will never be any thing more ;  
 The ocean of song heaves and glitters before him,  
 The depth and the vastness and longing sweep o’er him,  
 He knows every breaker and shoal on the chart,  
 He has the Coast Pilot and so on by heart,  
 Yet he spends his whole life, like the man in the fable,  
 In learning to swim on his library-table.”

We should not notice an imperfection of this sort in a trifle thrown off merely for the amusement of the hour, if we did not gather from a hint in the preface, that the writer intended to be faithful, and rather plumes himself on the correctness of his portraits. He says,—

“ All the characters sketched in this slight *jeu d’esprit*,  
 Though, it may be, they seem, here and there, rather free,  
 And drawn from a Mephistophelian stand-point,  
 Are meant to be faithful, and that is the grand point.”

When our bard has had a little more experience as a reviewer (Heaven forefend that he should have it, however !), he will learn that a well-drawn nose is not a good full-length portrait. But to show that he can sketch with more completeness, we copy the following lines devoted to Irving, which are nearly as good as any thing in Goldsmith : —

“What! Irving? thrice welcome, warm heart and fine brain,  
You bring back the happiest spirit from Spain,  
And the gravest sweet humor, that ever were there  
Since Cervantes met death in his gentle despair;  
Nay, don’t be embarrassed, nor look so beseeching,—  
I shan’t run directly against my own preaching,  
And, having just laughed at their Raphaels and Dantes,  
Go to setting you up besides matchless Cervantes;  
But allow me to speak what I honestly feel;—  
To a true poet-heart add the fun of Dick Steele,  
Throw in all of Addison, *minus* the chill,  
With the whole of that partnership’s stock, and good will,  
Mix well, and while stirring, hum o’er, as a spell,  
The fine *old* English Gentleman, simmer it well,  
Sweeten just to your own private liking, then strain,  
That only the finest and clearest remain,  
Let it stand out of doors till a soul it receives  
From the warm lazy sun loitering down through green leaves,  
And you’ll find a choice nature, not wholly deserving  
A name either English or Yankee,—just Irving.” — p. 63.

Another and frequent fault of our bard as a critic is, that he often gives us the features of the man in place of a character of the author, and, as a natural consequence, mixes up so much of personal liking or aversion with his drawings, that they lose all claim to fidelity. This fault is seen even in his choice of subjects. One or two of the most flattering portraiture in the book are of persons whom nobody ever heard of beyond the corner of the next street from that in which they live; and to make the matter worse, these are mixed up with sarcastic and depreciating sketches of bards whom, with all their faults, the whole civilized world has long since learned to admire. Judging solely from this little poem, one would get the impression that Harry Franco was somebody, and that the author of the *Thanatopsis* was nobody. Why, the unlucky atom himself, if he has any brains at all, would deprecate such an attempt to bring his claims into comparison with those of a world-renowned poet. We do not mean that our bard-critic is intentionally unfair to any one; but he evidently has no liking for Bryant’s style of poetry, which is too calm and equable, which belongs too much to the old school, and has too much of the majesty of repose, to suit the admirers of the intense and fervid manner which is now most in vogue. The *gravamen* of the charge against him is, that

he is more fond of depicting the various aspects of external nature, in their stillness and sublimity, than the passions of men and the woes engendered by them. It may be so ; but we are quite willing to take Bryant's excuse for it in his own magnificent lines :—

“ To him who in the love of nature holds  
Communion with her visible forms, she speaks  
A various language ; for his gayer hours  
She has a voice of gladness, and a smile  
And eloquence of beauty ; and she glides  
Into his darker musings with a mild  
And healing sympathy, that steals away  
Their sharpness, ere he is aware.”

It would be idle to quote further, for every person of taste in the country has the whole piece by heart, and in this *universal* popularity is the real test and seal of the poet's greatness. But in reference to the critical accusation now brought against Bryant, read the following short extract from his “Evening Reverie” :—

“ O thou great Movement of the universe,  
Or Change, or Flight of Time, — for ye are one ! —  
That bearest, silently, this visible scene  
Into Night’s shadow and the streaming rays  
Of starlight, whither art thou bearing me ?  
I feel the mighty current sweep me on,  
Yet know not whither. Man foretells afar  
The courses of the stars ; the very hour  
He knows when they shall darken or grow bright ;  
Yet doth the eclipse of sorrow and of death  
Come unforewarned. Who next, of those I love,  
Shall pass from life, or, sadder yet, shall fall  
From virtue ? Strife with foes, or bitterer strife  
With friends, or shame, and general scorn of men, —  
Which who can bear ? — or the fierce rack of pain,  
Lie they within my path ? Or shall the years  
Push me, with soft and inoffensive pace,  
Into the stilly twilight of my age ?  
Or do the portals of another life,  
Even now, while I am glorying in my strength,  
Impend around me ? O ! beyond that bourne,  
In the vast cycle of being, which begins  
At that broad threshold, with what fairer forms  
Shall the great law of change and progress clothe

Its workings? Gently,— so have good men taught, —  
 Gently, and without grief, the old shall glide  
 Into the new, the eternal flow of things,  
 Like a bright river of the fields of heaven,  
 Shall journey onward in perpetual peace.”

We are now ready to hear the criticism of our poet-reviewer, without allowing his wit to dazzle our perception of the truth.

“ There is Bryant, as quiet, as cool, and as dignified,  
 As a smooth, silent iceberg, that never is dignified,  
 Save when by reflection ‘t is kindled o’ nights  
 With a semblance of flame by the chill Northern Lights.  
 He may rank (Griswold says so) first bard of your nation,  
 (There’s no doubt that he stands in supreme ice-olation,)  
 Your topmost Parnassus he may set his heel on,  
 But no warm applauses come, peal following peal on,—  
 He’s too smooth and too polished to hang any zeal on:  
 Unqualified merits, I’ll grant, if you choose, he has ‘em,  
 But he lacks the one merit of kindling enthusiasm;  
 If he stir you at all, it is just, on my soul,  
 Like being stirred up with the very North Pole.

“ He is very nice reading in summer, but *inter Nos*, we don’t want *extra* freezing in winter;  
 Take him up in the depth of July, my advice is,  
 When you feel an Egyptian devotion to ices.  
 But, deduct all you can, there’s enough that’s right good in  
 him;  
 He has a true soul for field, river, and wood in him;  
 And his heart, in the midst of brick walls, or where’er it is,  
 Glows, softens, and thrills with the tenderest charities,—  
 To you mortals that delve in this trade-ridden planet?  
 No, to old Berkshire’s hills, with their limestone and granite.  
 If you’re one who *in loco* (add *foco* here) *desipis*,  
 You will get of his outermost heart (as I guess) a piece;  
 But you’d get deeper down, if you came as a precipice,  
 And would break the last seal of its inwardest fountain,  
 If you only could palm yourself off for a mountain.”

— pp. 37–39.

Are there two people in the world, who can read the preceding extracts in connection, and yet acknowledge the justice of the latter? We have not room to give the whole passage relating to Bryant, but as we have extracted the

severer portion of it, we add in candor all that is said in his praise.

“ He’s a Cowper condensed, with no craziness bitten,  
And the advantage that Wordsworth before him has written.

“ But, my dear little bardlings, don’t prick up your ears,  
Nor suppose I would rank you and Bryant as peers ;  
If I call him an iceberg, I don’t mean to say  
There is nothing in that which is grand, in its way ;  
He is almost the one of your poets that knows  
How much grace, strength, and dignity lie in Repose ;  
If he sometimes fall short, he is too wise to mar  
His thought’s modest fulness by going too far.” — pp. 39, 40.

But enough of fault-finding, which has been forced upon us only by our author’s claim to be considered as a faithful critic ; his pretensions as a poet and a wit we admit without question. As a general rule, we believe that poets make very poor critics ; they are too apt to look at their brother bards through the medium of their own verses. To give our author his revenge, we will very gladly allow that reviewers would write shocking bad poetry ; only we never heard of one who was insane enough to make the trial.

To give our readers a favorable idea of the lighter portions of this Fable, we quote the following proposition, merely leaving out of the middle of it some poor gibes against clergymen who are in favor of capital punishment.

“ I’ve thought very often ‘t would be a good thing  
In all public collections of books, if a wing  
Were set off by itself, like the seas from the dry lands,  
Marked *Literature suited to desolate islands*,  
And filled with such books as could never be read  
Save by readers of proofs, forced to do it for bread,—  
Such books as one’s wrecked on in small country-taverns,  
Such as hermits might mortify over in caverns,  
Such as Satan, if printing had then been invented,  
As the climax of woe, would to Job have presented,  
Such as Crusoe might dip in, although there are few so  
Outrageously cornered by fate as poor Crusoe.

“ Now, instead of all this, I think I can direct you all  
To a criminal code both humane and effectual ;—  
I propose to shut up every doer of wrong  
With these desperate books, for such term, short or long,

As by statute in such cases made and provided,  
 Shall be by your wise legislators decided  
 Thus : — Let murderers be shut, to grow wiser and cooler,  
 At hard labor for life on the works of Miss — ;  
 Petty thieves, kept from flagrant crimes by their fears,  
 Shall peruse Yankee Doodle a blank term of years, —  
 That American Punch, like the English, no doubt, —  
 Just the sugar and lemons and spirit left out.

“ But stay, here comes Tityrus Griswold, and leads on  
 The flocks whom he first plucks alive, and then feeds on, —  
 A loud cackling swarm, in whose feathers warm-drest,  
 He goes for as perfect a — swan, as the rest.” — pp. 24—26.

And here is a portion of the merry caricature of a born reviewer.

“ Through his babyhood no kind of pleasure he took  
 In any amusement but tearing a book ;  
 For him there was no intermediate stage,  
 From babyhood up to strait-laced middle age ;  
 There were years when he didn’t wear coat-tails behind,  
 But a boy he could never be rightly defined ;  
 Like the Irish Good Folk, though in length scarce a span,  
 From the womb he came gravely, a little old man ;  
 While other boys’ trowsers demanded the toil  
 Of the motherly fingers on all kinds of soil,  
 Red, yellow, brown, black, clayey, gravelly, loamy,  
 He sat in a corner and read *Viri Romæ*.  
 He never was known to unbend or to revel once  
 In base, marbles, hockey, or kick up the devil once ;  
 He was just one of those who excite the benevolence  
 Of old prigs who sound the soul’s depths with a ledger,  
 And are on the look-out for some young men to ‘ edger-  
 -cate,’ as they call it, who won’t be too costly,  
 And who ’ll afterward take to the ministry mostly ;  
 Who always wear spectacles, always look bilious,  
 Always keep on good terms with each *mater-familias*  
 Throughout the whole parish, and manage to rear  
 Ten boys like themselves, on four hundred a year ;  
 Who, fulfilling in turn the same fearful conditions,  
 Either preach through their noses, or go upon missions.”

— pp. 10, 11.

Our next quotation shall be a sketch of one of the Transcendent blue-stockings, who unfortunately are so numerous

in our great cities, where they infest lecture-rooms and get up æsthetical tea-parties, that no one of them has a right to say the cap was specially intended to fit *her* head.

“ ‘ But there comes Miranda, Zeus ! where shall I flee to ?  
 She has such a penchant for bothering me too !  
 She always keeps asking if I don’t observe a  
 Particular likeness ’twixt her and Minerva ;  
 She tells me my efforts in verse are quite clever ; —  
 She ’s been travelling now, and will be worse than ever ;  
 One would think, though, a sharp-sighted noter she ’d be  
 Of all that ’s worth mentioning over the sea,  
 For a woman must surely see well, if she try,  
 The whole of whose being ’s a capital **I** :  
 She will take an old notion, and make it her own,  
 By saying it o’er in her Sybilline tone,  
 Or persuade you ’t is something tremendously deep,  
 By repeating it so as to put you to sleep ;  
 And she well may defy any mortal to see through it,  
 When once she has mixed up her infinite *me* through it.  
 There is one thing she owns in her own single right, —  
 It is native and genuine, — namely, her spite ;  
 Though, when acting as Censor, she privately blows  
 A censer of vanity ’neath her own nose.’

“ Here Miranda came up, and said, ‘ Phœbus ! you know  
 That the Infinite Soul has its infinite woe,  
 As I ought to know, having lived cheek by jowl,  
 Since the day I was born, with the Infinite Soul ;  
 I myself introduced, I myself, I alone,  
 To my Land’s better life authors solely my own,  
 Who the sad heart of earth on their shoulders have taken,  
 Whose works sound a depth by Life’s quiet unshaken,  
 Such as Shakspeare, for instance, the Bible, and Bacon,  
 Not to mention my own works ; Time’s nadir is fleet,  
 And, as for myself, I’m quite out of conceit ’ —

“ ‘ Quite out of conceit ! I ’m enchanted to hear it,’  
 Cried Apollo aside, ‘ Who ’d have thought she was near it ?

“ (Miranda meanwhile has succeeded in driving  
 Up into a corner, in spite of their striving,  
 A small flock of terrified victims, and there,  
 With an I-turn-the-crank-of-the-Universe air  
 And a tone which, at least to *my* fancy, appears  
 Not so much to be entering as boxing your ears,

Is unfolding a tale (of herself, I surmise,  
For 't is dotted as thick as a peacock's with I's.)"— pp. 51—54.

To show what our author is capable of doing when in a more serious mood, we copy a portion of his beautiful and well-merited tribute to Mrs. Child.

“ There comes Philothea, her face all aglow,  
She has just been dividing some poor creature's woe,  
And can't tell which pleases her most, to relieve  
His want, or his story to hear and believe ;  
No doubt against many deep griefs she prevails,  
For her ear is the refuge of destitute tales ;  
She knows well that silence is sorrow's best food,  
And that talking draws off from the heart its black blood.

“ The pole, science tells us, the magnet controls,  
But she is a magnet to emigrant Poles,  
And folks with a mission that nobody knows  
Throng thickly about her as bees round a rose ;  
She can fill up the *carets* in such, make their scope  
Converge to some focus of rational hope,  
And, with sympathies fresh as the morning, their gall  
Can transmute into honey,— but this is not all ;  
Not only for these she has solace, oh, say,  
Vice's desperate nursling adrift in Broadway,  
Who clingest, with all that is left of thee human,  
To the last slender spar from the wreck of the woman,  
Hast thou not found one shore where those tired drooping feet  
Could reach firm mother-earth, one full heart on whose beat  
The soothed head in silence reposing could hear  
The chimes of far childhood throb thick on the ear ?  
Ah, there 's many a beam from the fountain of day  
That, to reach us unclouded, must pass, on its way,  
Through the soul of a woman, and hers is wide ope  
To the influence of Heaven as the blue eyes of Hope ;  
Yes, a great soul is hers, one that dares to go in  
To the prison, the slave-hut, the alleys of sin,  
And to bring into each, or to find there, some line  
Of the never completely out-trampled divine ;  
If her heart at high floods swamps her brain now and then,  
'T is but richer for that when the tide ebbs again,  
As, after old Nile has subsided, his plain  
Overflows with a second broad deluge of grain ;  
What a wealth would it bring to the narrow and sour,  
Could they be as a Child but for one little hour ! ” — pp. 59—63.

We have hardly left ourselves room to say a word about our old favorite, Holmes ; but as he is also everybody's favorite, there is no occasion for critics to meddle with him, either to censure or to praise. He can afford to laugh at the whole reviewing fraternity. His wit is all his own, so sly and tingling, but without a drop of ill-nature in it, and never leaving a sting behind. His humor is so grotesque and queer, that it reminds one of the frolics of Puck ; and deep pathos minglest with it so naturally, that when the reader's eyes are brimming with tears, he knows not whether they have their source in sorrow or in laughter. The great merits of his English style we noticed on a former occasion ; for point, idiomatic propriety, and terseness, it is absolutely without a rival. Even our caustic rhyming reviewer gives him his full meed of praise in this respect.

“ You went crazy last year over Bulwer’s New Timon ; —  
 Why, if B., to the day of his dying, should rhyme on,  
 Heaping verses on verses and tomes upon tomes,  
 He could ne’er reach the best point and vigor of Holmes.  
 His are just the fine hands, too, to weave you a lyric  
 Full of fancy, fun, feeling, or spiced with satyric  
 In so kindly a measure, that nobody knows  
 What to do but e’en join in the laugh, friends and foes.”

— p. 68.

This “ enlarged edition ” of Holmes’s poetry is not so much larger than the former collection as we had hoped ; and as most of the additional pieces have appeared in print, though not in the former volume, the public are already familiar with them. We find it difficult, therefore, to purloin any thing from it for the benefit of our readers ; but the lines *On Lending a Punch-Bowl* are so characteristic, that we must borrow the greater part of them, though we have not room for the whole, and it is a shame to mutilate so fine a piece.

“ This ancient silver bowl of mine, — it tells of good old times,  
 Of joyous days and jolly nights, and merry Christmas chimes ;  
 They were a free and jovial race, but honest, brave, and true,  
 That dipped their ladle in the punch when this old bowl was  
 new.

“ A Spanish galleon brought the bar,—so runs the ancient tale,—  
 ’T was hammered by an Antwerp smith, whose arm was like  
 a flail ;

And now and then between the strokes, for fear his strength  
should fail,  
He wiped his brow, and quaffed a cup of good old Flemish ale.

“ ‘T was on a dreary winter’s eve, the night was closing dim,  
When old Miles Standish took the bowl, and filled it to the  
brim,  
The little Captain stood and stirred the posset with his sword,  
And all his sturdy men-at-arms were ranged about the board.

“ He poured the fiery hollands in,—the man that never feared,—  
He took a long and solemn draught, and wiped his yellow  
beard;  
And one by one the musketeers, the men that fought and  
prayed,  
All drank as ’t were their mother’s milk, and not a man afraid !

“ That night, affrighted from his nest, the screaming eagle flew,  
He heard the Pequot’s ringing whoop, the soldier’s wild halloo ;  
And there the sachem learned the rule he taught to kith and  
kin,  
‘ Run from the white man when you find he smells of hollands  
gin !’

“ A hundred years, and fifty more, had spread their leaves and  
snows,  
A thousand rubs had flattened down each little cherub’s nose ;  
When once again the bowl was filled, but not in mirth or joy,  
‘T was mingled by a mother’s hand to cheer her parting boy.

“ ‘ Drink, John,’ she said, ‘ ‘t will do you good,— poor child,  
you ’ll never bear  
This working in the dismal trench, out in the midnight air,  
And if — God bless me — you were hurt, ‘t would keep away  
the chill ’;  
So John *did* drink, — and well he wrought that night at Bunker’s Hill !

“ I tell you, there was generous warmth in good old English  
cheer ;  
I tell you, ‘t was a pleasant thought to bring its symbol here ;  
‘T is but the fool that loves excess, — hast thou a drunken soul,  
Thy bane is in thy shallow skull, not in my silver bowl !

“ I love the memory of the past,—its pressed, yet fragrant flowers,—  
The moss that clothes its broken walls,—the ivy on its towers,—  
Nay, this poor bawble it bequeathed,—my eyes grow moist  
and dim,  
To think of all the vanished joys that danced around its brim.

“ Then fill a fair and honest cup, and bear it straight to me ;  
The goblet hallows all it holds, whate'er the liquid be ;  
And may the cherubs on its face protect me from the sin  
That dooms one to those dreadful words,—“ My dear, where  
*have you been?* ” — pp. 253—257.

---

ART. VIII.—*Merry-Mount, a Romance of the Massachusetts Colony.* Boston : James Munroe & Co. 1848.  
2 vols. 12mo.

THE early history of Plymouth and Massachusetts, though it is a record of adventures, perils, and hardships, and many strongly marked characters appear in it, certainly presents few materials for romance. The whole foreground of the canvas is occupied by the grim figures of the Puritans, and in the distance appear only a few Indians flitting about like shadows in the interminable forests. It is a wild and stern scene, but its features are not pliable enough for the imagination to work upon. It does not offer those striking contrasts of situation and character, that variety of costume and scenery, or those rapid alternations of fortune, of light and gloom, in which the writer of fiction delights. The story is even a monotonous recital of exile, labor, and suffering, bravely endured from the holiest of all motives. It claims attention and study from the moralist, the philosophical observer of human nature, and even from the statesman ; but it hardly arrests the notice of those who crave only a pleasurable excitement of the fancy and the intellect. The earliest settlers were all men of the same stamp, or they differed from each other only in shades and degrees of what we now call religious fanaticism. Their mode of life, during the infancy of